

House Republican Press Release

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Press Office: 860-240-8700

Cell Phones and Budgets



By State Representative John J. Ryan

After at least a half-dozen years of attempts, we finally took a large step towards passing a 'hand-held cell phone use while driving ban' bill last week, when the House passed H.B. 6722 by a wide margin. This topic is an excellent example of several legislative phenomena at work here, as follows:

- Some issues take quite a while to get there: the General Assembly often moves slowly when dealing with a concept. While cell phones are hardly a new invention, it has taken years of false starts as the process wound along; many legislators, quite frankly did not see this as a major issue until recently.

It is sometimes difficult to follow legislation: if you were 'bill tracking' by actually following this legislation through the internet and the Connecticut General Assembly website, you would be wondering what happened! The original bill, HB 6584, with many co-sponsors, actually did not 'go anywhere', as the concept morphed into a completely different bill, HB 6722. And when HB 6722 actually came to the floor, it was immediately replaced by a 'strike everything amendment' as "House A," which was a completely new rewrite of the bill. It would not be surprising if the Senate tinkers with the language even further when they take up the bill; maybe as soon as this week.

Just because it is an important topic....you are not assured of a result. For years, police chiefs and other law enforcement groups have been emphasizing the urgent need for action. Maybe it has been the overwhelming number of people that we see holding a cell phone up to their ear while driving that finally got the attention of other legislators?

Many co-sponsors do not guarantee passage: in previous years, a host of legislators were 'on board' for that year's version of the bill, and it still did not get anywhere. This year, a number of key legislators (one important one being Sen. "Billy" Ciotto, co-chair of the Transportation Committee) who were not supporters in the past, now back the bill.

So stay tuned; something may finally actually happen on this important issue!

- On the budget front, I wish that I could be as optimistic. If you recall our columns from earlier this year, Governor Rell presented a budget package, with the strong message that she would not support significantly raising spending and taxes. As some of us accurately predicted, the Democrat legislative majority recently proposed their own budget, undoing many of the Governor's proposals, and substantially increasing income and other taxes. One might postulate that they viewed the Governor's budget proposal as an opening offer, and proposed their own counter-offer, expecting to settle somewhere in the middle. As one leading Democrat said, concerning the issue that the Democrat budget is significantly past the State's spending cap, they view the cap as only a "guide," not a straitjacket.

So the parties to the budget negotiations are far apart, at least philosophically. Here's hoping that the General Assembly is not in for another long summer of extra-inning Special Sessions!

Please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at John.Ryan@housegop.state.ct.us or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.